

China: Strategic Culture Questions

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March, 2002

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE MAR 2002		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-03-2002 to 00-03-2002	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE China: Strategic Culture Questions				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 11	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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1. Liu Ji, former Deputy Chairman of the China Academy of Social Sciences, was quoted as saying, “Individualism, if expanded beyond control, is just like cancer to society. (Individualism) is not suitable for China.” (Hong Kong South China Morning Post, 13 Feb 01) He cited Chinese cultural values, such as collectivism, as a better choice for China. However, individualism is an integral component of capitalism in the west. It is viewed in a positive light, responsible for encouraging entrepreneurship, education for upward mobility purposes, and productivity in the workplace. What do you think of Liu Ji’s view that individualism is not desirable in China? If individualism is not desirable, how will collectivist practices encourage individuals to work hard, produce at high levels, and invest in the economy? How will the entrepreneurs who already comprise the wealthy elite fit into a ‘collective’ model?

2. Over the past decade, communism seems to be gradually losing its appeal to the general public. The people appear ready for new social programs and different ideological emphasis. The new social programs, called the ‘socialist ethic system’ in the Party’s “Implementation Outline on Ethic Building for Citizens” (issued by the Central Committee through China News Services, Oct 01) stresses the importance of developing the socialist market economy, maintaining social order, improving the quality of China’s citizens, and building socialist structures with Chinese characteristics. How are these new concepts different from previous programs, themes and ideology? Are the new messages evolutionary, or revolutionary? How can the existing social structures

accommodate change? What will the difficulties be? What does it mean specifically for the average Chinese rural citizen? For urban citizens?

3. Given that most economic policies are shifting from communist to capitalist in nature, how will Chinese history describe the communist period? Will the prose be more complimentary or critical? What will the criticisms be? What will the complements be?

4. As China integrates more and more into the global economy, expertise in foreign languages will become increasingly important. Numerous departments and agencies of the United States government, including the Departments of Commerce, Justice and State, have voiced concern about the current shortage of Chinese linguists in the US. US leaders are considering programs and incentives to encourage employees to learn Chinese. What has China done to meet its requirements for linguists? In what languages are you experiencing shortfalls of linguists? Is Beijing encouraging citizens to learn English or other western languages? Through what kinds of programs?

5. China is opening up to foreign business investment at a rapid rate. More than 80 of America's top companies, such as GE, Motorola, AT&T, Ford, Boeing, IBM, and Chrysler, have established operations in China. Each company brings with it a set of established business practices and operating norms. These American 'standard operating procedures' may conflict with China's traditional business practices and with the Chinese labor pool's past experiences. What are the difficulties in hosting these corporations, particularly in the area of labor relations and practices?

6. One of the principal aspects of Confucianism is that personal relationships are hierarchical, flowing from the leader down to the people through various levels of social arrangements, such as the family. In this system, parents are respected by their children; likewise, elders are respected by the youth in society. This type of social structure seems to conflict with the way that capitalism rewards 'ability' rather than 'age' or 'years of experience.' What impact does age have on promotion opportunities in China? Describe how employers prioritize between age and ability when selecting personnel for management/leadership positions. How does the current, hierarchical system ensure that the 'most capable' person is selected for promotion, rather than the eldest?

7. Many of China's government and business leaders are well-recognized, entrenched members of the establishment, with commensurate privileges, titles, and power. How will these elite businessmen react to competition from new entrepreneurs? What actions might they take to maintain a privileged status? What steps has the government taken to ensure fair competition?

8. Some non-Chinese scholars suggest that even today, the non-violent preachings of Confucian-Tao philosophies manifest themselves in a general desire for accommodation over violence by China's leaders. On the other hand, a noted American academic and author (Alastair Iain Johnston) suggests that China's leaders have always regarded force as an important part of national prestige and survival, to be used when China's power is estimated as adequate enough to ensure victory over an adversary. Which school of

thought do you believe best characterizes the perspective of current Chinese leadership and why? When is using force acceptable for China? How do you view the US' use of force over the past decade?

9. The rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) require a large amount of openness in business practices. However, Chinese business practices are typically secretive, centered on hierarchical business relationships. In light of the problem you are having with corruption, particularly in the banks, what steps is Beijing taking to prepare for the transparency that comes with WTO regulations? What will need to change?

10. China has a long history of economic disparities between geographic regions. As the economy surges, gaps are widening between the wealthy eastern provinces and the west. Some reports indicate that resentment about the disparities is increasing among the people living in the western provinces. A professor at Occidental College (Xiao-huang Yin, quoted in the Atlantic Monthly, April 1994), said of his recent visit to western China that, "A petty cadre from Gansu, a poor northwestern province, complained to me, 'You know, the relationship between us inlanders and you guys on the coast is just like that between underdeveloped countries and industrial nations. We supply you with raw materials and cheap migrant labor, but you turn around and sell us secondhand products at high prices. The gap bleeds us inland people of capital and resources. You robbed us of everything, from money to women!'" How does Beijing view the increasing disparity between regions? What is being done to address the gaps? Do you think the Gansu

resident quoted above represents widespread sentiment? Are there signs that laborers are organizing?

11. Despite his disastrous policies, a new deification of Mao has emerged. After years of obscurity, Mao's image has become a pop culture icon, appearing on key chains, paintings, and shirts. This phenomenon began under Deng Xioping, who was wary of its potential implications. Deng thought it prudent to separate himself from Mao's legacy, choosing to follow Confucius' advice about spirits, 'they must be respected, but kept at a distance.' In the early 1990s, Deng said, "Right now certain people are set on launching a campaign to glorify Mao. In my view it is abnormal, nothing more than a provocation that is contrary to our fundamental orientation...young people today who do not understand the last forty years of the history of our country may be given the wrong impression." In The Sun That Never Sets, Journalist Jia Lusheng suggests that China's renewed fascination with Mao reflects a longing for the early years of Maoist rule (before the massive political purges), when the country was more 'stable with a leader of mythic proportions to look up to' (Orville Schell, the Atlantic Monthly, Dec 1992). How would the current leadership prefer that Mao's rule be remembered? Why do you believe that Mao's image is so popular now?

12. Ostensibly, China's nuclear posture has always been defensive. China advocates a 'no-first-use' (NFU) nuclear posture, and has attempted to get other nations (including the US) to sign a NFU treaty. NFU policy supports China's professed 'defensive' geostrategic outlook. A 1998 white paper issued by the Chinese government stated that,

“China possesses a small number of nuclear weapons, entirely for meeting the needs of self-defense.” Recently, there are indications that China is developing tactical nuclear weapons. If true, under what operational concepts would tactical nuclear weapons be used? From Beijing’s perspective, what are the advantages and disadvantages of moving away from the stated NFU policy in the future?

13. China’s leaders are proud of their rich cultural history, and they remain interested in maintaining cultural ‘purity’. In the past, it was acceptable for outsiders to become assimilated to Chinese culture, but it was not desirable for outside ideas or cultural traits to mix into Chinese culture. During the ‘open door’ policies of the 1980s, Deng warned the people to, “keep a clear head, and firmly resist corruption by decadent ideas from abroad.” (Quoted by Orville Schell in Mandate of Heaven, 1994) As a result, students were not often exposed to other cultures and foreign ideas. Recently, however, Beijing has increased the opportunities for foreign students to study in China, and Chinese students to study abroad. What are the goals of the leadership in increasing the level of cultural exchanges? How is the infusion of ‘outside’ ideas and norms into Chinese culture viewed? In what ways will increased cultural intermingling alter the tenacity of Chinese culture? How are marriages between Chinese and foreigners generally viewed?

14. Historically, relations with Japan have been adversarial, or strained. Memories of Japanese brutalities in China complicate the development of improved relations. How would you characterize China’s relationship with Japan now? What goals does Beijing have for relations with Japan?

15. A long history of internal revolt and rebellion would make any regime sensitive to civil protest. In the west, a certain level of disagreement and protest is tolerated as a normal by-product of change and cultural diversity. Ironically, the basis of the current regime's legitimacy, the communist revolution, epitomizes the potentially serious nature of internal unrest. Beijing's reaction to the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989 suggests that civil unrest in China is viewed as a grave threat to the regime. How does the current regime regard civil protest? What political opposition groups present serious challenge to Beijing at this time? How would you characterize the unrest in China today? (political, economic, religious, ethnic)

16. Throughout history, China suffered repeated invasions and frequent regime-changing internal struggles. Many western scholars say that Beijing regards internal unrest and invasion as its top threats. At the strategic level, what does Beijing currently believe is its biggest threat? Please comment on Beijing's perception of other threats, both internal and external.

17. Lessons learned during China's chaotic Warring States era provide a counterbalance to the Confucian-Taoist philosophies of avoiding violence. During this period, various warring factions competed with each other for regional hegemony. Strong states often exerted their will against weaker states, usually with devastating results. In some cases, the balance was shifted as weaker states combined efforts to bring the power back into balance by weakening the stronger state. Realpolitik lessons from the Warring States

period help shape China's strategic culture today. From this perspective, the presence of the United States in the Pacific region could be perceived as a 'strong state' interfering in China's area of interest. How does China view the US activity and presence in the Pacific region? How does US presence in the Pacific impact China's interests, particularly in the South China Sea?

18. Throughout China's history, Chinese culture has remained intact. Invaders usually adopted the 'higher' Chinese customs and processes, rather than imposing their own. However, both Taiwan and Hong Kong represent pockets of successful Chinese people who abandoned their 'pure' culture and systems, assimilating western processes and customs. Potential reunification with Taiwan and the seamless integration of Hong Kong could become bitter pills for Beijing as mainlanders are exposed to fellow Chinese acting and operating successfully under very different cultural norms and systems. If reunification occurs, what aspects of Taiwan's customs and practices will clash with mainland Chinese customs? How will Beijing reconcile Taiwan's different approach and processes with China's traditional practices?

19. Chinese leaders profess to have a defensive national strategy, rather than an offensively oriented outlook. Some scholars suggest that, historically, China has been very offensively oriented when strong enough to exert force over adversaries. China is growing stronger economically and is currently placing priority on modernizing the military. As China's economic and military strength grows, where in the region might China's policy become more proactively oriented? Are current plans for military

equipment acquisition only defensive in nature, or is there a balance between offensive and defense planning?

20. Both China and the United States are influential actors on the world stage. Classic international relations theory pits China against the US in a natural balance-of-power struggle. However, much can be gained by increased economic interaction and working together on areas of mutual concern, such as non-proliferation of WMD, counter-terrorism, and counter-drug operations. How can a mutually beneficial relationship be formed and continued into the future? From Beijing's perspective, what are the stumbling blocks to forming a peaceful, mutually beneficial relationship between the two nations? How would you respond to the statement that a power struggle between China and the US is inevitable?

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